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# Impression Management and Self-Deceptive Enhancement Among Hispanic and Non-Hispanic White Navy Recruits

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**ABSTRACT.** As part of a larger investigation of response effects on organizational surveys, the present study compared the responses of Hispanic and non-Hispanic U.S. Navy recruits on the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR). The inventory contains two measures of socially desirable responding: impression management, the deliberate tendency to over-report desirable behaviors and under-report undesirable ones, and self-deceptive enhancement, the tendency to give overly positive but honest self-reports. Hispanic recruits had significantly higher scores than non-Hispanic Whites on impression management; the two groups did not, however, differ on self-deceptive enhancement. These findings suggest that Hispanics may be more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to present a positive picture of themselves to others but do not differ from non-Hispanic Whites on the amount of positive self-deceptive enhancement they engage in. The results were interpreted with reference to the Hispanic cultural value of *simpatia*.

**ATTITUDE SURVEYS** are a popular method for gathering information on employee perceptions and measuring organizational change (Hinrichs, 1985). A persistent issue affecting the accuracy of employee attitude surveys is socially desirable responding, the tendency for a person to present a positively biased picture of himself or herself (cf. Nederhof, 1985).

Although all socially desirable responding involves presenting oneself in a positive light, several studies (Paulhus, 1984; Paulhus & Reid, 1991; Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987) have reported empirical evidence that distinguishes two types of socially desirable responding: impression management (IM) and self-deceptive enhancement (SDE). According to Paulhus, IM is a deliberate tendency to over-report desirable behaviors and under-report undesirable ones.

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SDE, in contrast, is characterized by overly positive but honest self-reports. In SDE, the respondent actually believes his or her positive self-reports; in IM, the respondent does not.

Studies of IM and SDE in organizational settings have typically not considered the impact that cultural differences may have on survey responses. Some evidence (e.g., Marin & Marin, 1991; Ross & Mirowsky, 1984) suggests that Hispanics may be more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to engage in socially desirable responding. Marin and Marin, (1991, p. 101) noted, in their volume on research with Hispanic populations: "For some time now, investigators [e.g., Ross & Mirowsky, 1984] have suggested that care needs to be taken when analyzing and interpreting Hispanic data because of concerns that Hispanics may often provide inaccurate and socially desirable responses." Ross and Mirowsky (1984) found that Mexican-Americans were more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to engage in socially desirable responding. This finding has been interpreted as being consistent with *simpatía* (Triandis, Marin, Betancourt, Lisansky, & Chang, 1982), a culture-specific Hispanic script that emphasizes the need for behaviors that promote smooth, pleasant, interpersonal relations. Individuals with *simpatía* emphasize positive behaviors, minimize negative behaviors, and generally try to conform to the expectations of others (Marin & Marin, 1991).

In Ross and Mirowsky's (1984) study of Hispanics, socially desirable responding was assessed by using the Marlowe-Crowne Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). This scale, as shown by Paulhus (1984), taps both SDE and IM. Thus, it is unclear whether Hispanics score higher than non-Hispanic Whites on both types of socially desirable responding, or only on one type. In the present study, we compared the scores of Hispanic and non-Hispanic U.S. Navy recruits on the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1990), a measure that assesses SDE and IM separately.

## Method

The study was conducted as part of a larger project (Booth-Kewley, Edwards, & Rosenfield, in press) that compared the responses of Navy recruits who completed the questionnaire under either computer or paper-and-pencil conditions.<sup>1</sup>

*The opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors. They are not official and do not represent the views of the Navy Department.*

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<sup>1</sup>For the larger study, the design and procedure were as follows. There were two

## Subjects and Measures

The sample consisted of 24 Hispanic and 191 non-Hispanic White male U.S. Navy recruits who were completing basic training in San Diego.<sup>2</sup> Because only male recruits are currently trained in San Diego, women were not included in this study. All participants had a high school diploma or general equivalency degree; 40% had also completed some college. The majority of the participants (89%) were single; the mean age was 20 years.

In addition to the primary measures of concern, participants provided information on their age, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Recruits also completed a postexperiment questionnaire assessing their reactions to the study. All items, except for demographics, were presented on Likert scales ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

The IM and the SDE scales of the BIDR-Version 6 (Paulhus, 1990) were administered. Sample items from the 20-item IM scale include "I never cover up my mistakes" and "I always obey laws, even if I'm unlikely to get caught." Sample items from the 20-item SDE scale include "My first impressions of people usually turn out to be right" and "I never regret my decisions." Higher scores indicate greater SDE or IM. Paulhus (1990) reported adequate internal consistency reliability for both the IM (ranging from .80 to .86) and SDE (ranging from .70 to .80) scales.

The recruits also completed a slightly modified version of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). The original 15 items of this questionnaire were changed by substituting "the Navy" for the words "this organization." Adequate internal consistency reliability (ranging from .82 to .93) has been found for this measure (Mowday et al., 1979).

Respondents completed the Computer Anxiety Rating Scale (CARS; Heinssen, Glass, & Knight, 1987), a 19-item measure of computer anxiety

levels of administration mode (Computer and Paper and Pencil) and two levels of anonymity (Anonymous and Identified). Recruits who agreed to participate were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions: Paper and Pencil, Anonymous; Paper and Pencil, Identified; Computer, Anonymous; or Computer, Identified. In the Anonymous conditions, respondents were not asked for identification information other than demographics (i.e., age, education level, race, and marital status). In the Identified conditions, respondents were asked to provide their names, social security numbers, and permanent mailing addresses. All respondents were assured that their individual responses would be kept confidential.

<sup>2</sup>In the original study, there were 246 recruits: 24 Hispanics, 191 non-Hispanic Whites, 15 Blacks, and 16 recruits belonging to other racial/ethnic groups. Because the purpose of the present study was to compare response patterns among non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanics, Blacks and members of other minority groups were not included in the present sample.

and negative attitudes toward computers. Heinssen et al. reported an internal consistency reliability of .87 for the CARS.

### Procedure

Recruits completed the questionnaires, in groups ranging in size from 10 to 20 people, as a scheduled part of testing during their military basic training. Participation was voluntary; only three recruits refused to participate.

### Results

Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) revealed no differences between non-Hispanic White and Hispanic recruits on age,  $F(1, 214) = .74, p > .10$ ; education level,  $F(1, 214) = .65, p > .10$ ; or marital status,  $F(1, 214) = 2.17, p > .10$ .

### BIDR

The ANOVAs revealed that Hispanics scored significantly higher ( $M = 58.4$ ) than non-Hispanic Whites did ( $M = 53.5$ ) on the IM scale,  $F(1, 214) = 4.49, p < .05$ . On the SDE scale, however, no difference was found between non-Hispanic White ( $M = 62.9$ ) and Hispanic ( $M = 62.3$ ) respondents,  $F(1, 214) = .08, p > .10$ .<sup>3</sup>

### Other Scales

The ANOVAs that we performed to compare non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanics on the other individual difference variables—organizational commitment and computer anxiety—revealed no significant differences (all  $ps > .20$ ).

<sup>3</sup>Because the analysis of the data for the main study (Booth-Kewley, Edwards, & Rosenfeld, in press) revealed that respondents' IM and SDE scores were significantly higher under Identified than under Anonymous conditions, the data were examined to determine whether Hispanics were more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to have completed the questionnaires in the Identified condition. Fifteen of 24 Hispanics were in the Identified condition, compared with 95 of 191 non-Hispanic Whites. However, a chi-square test of independence (for Ethnicity and Identified/Anonymous) was not significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 215) = 1.39, p > .20$ . Furthermore, under both Anonymous and Identified conditions, Hispanics scored higher than non-Hispanic Whites did on IM.

### Postexperimental Questionnaire

Comparisons of non-Hispanic White and Hispanic responses to a number of postexperiment questions revealed a difference on only one item: "I felt that all of the information I have provided will be kept confidential." Hispanics were significantly more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to agree with this statement,  $F(1, 214) = 4.29, p < .05$ .

### Discussion

Our finding that Hispanic U.S. Navy recruits had higher scores than their non-Hispanic White counterparts had on the IM scale but not on the SDE scale supports the findings in other studies (e.g., Ross & Mirowsky, 1984) that Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to give socially desirable responses. The results suggest that Hispanic responses on instruments that are sensitive to social desirability may represent a strategic, conscious effort to manage a favorable impression in the eyes of others (cf. Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989; 1991). The similarity of the two groups with regard to SDE scores indicates that, although Hispanics seek to present a positive public view of themselves to others, their own self-images are no more positively biased than are the self-images of non-Hispanic Whites.

As representation of Hispanics increases both in civilian organizations (Edwards, Thomas, & Burch, 1992), and in the military (Rosenfeld & Culbertson, in press), caution may be warranted in interpreting organizational survey data gathered from Hispanics. However, although differences were obtained on a measure specifically designed to tap IM, there were no differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic White recruits on standardized measures of SDE, organizational commitment, and computer anxiety. Similarly, our research (Booth-Kewley, Rosenfeld, & Edwards, 1991; Edwards, Rosenfeld, & Thomas, 1990) on Hispanic blue-collar employees in the U.S. Navy's civilian workforce found few systematic differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic Whites on a variety of standardized organizational indices; thus, it would be premature to assert that Hispanic responses on standard organizational surveys are tainted by social desirability motives. What this research does suggest, however, is that Hispanics' higher scores on social desirability inventories are due to IM motives rather than to overly positive but sincere responding.

In attempting to explain the greater socially desirable responding of Hispanics, Marin and Marin (1991) noted that, in addition to simpatia, Hispanic's lower education level and socioeconomic status may account for their increased socially desirable responding. Although information on the socioeconomic status of respondents in the present study was not available, Hispanic and non-Hispanic White respondents were found to be equivalent on educational level. Thus, our findings support Marin and Marin's contention

that simpatia may be a reason for Hispanics' higher levels of socially desirable responding.

Although in the present study we sought to demonstrate that Hispanics score higher than non-Hispanic Whites on the IM scale but similarly to non-Hispanic Whites on the SDE scale, these results should be interpreted with caution because of the study's limitations. First, because the data were originally gathered for another purpose, the number of Hispanics in the sample was small. Second, there is evidence that Hispanic U.S. Navy recruits may not be typical of Hispanics in the general population (cf. Triandis, 1985). That this may have been the case in the present study is underscored by the similarity of Hispanic and non-Hispanic White respondents on educational level, a variable that shows large differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic Whites in the U.S. population (Dunn, 1991). Furthermore, although both this study and a previous investigation (Hui & Triandis, 1989) of Hispanic response characteristics used new recruits of the U.S. Navy as participants, new recruits may not accurately represent Hispanics as a group in the military (cf. Rosenfeld & Culbertson, 1992). Thus, generalizations of these findings to other populations should be made with caution.

The 1990 U.S. Census showed that Hispanics now constitute 9% of the U.S. population (Barringer, 1991). Therefore, it is important that organizational researchers who rely on self-report instruments be aware of potential differential response characteristics of Hispanic employees. In addition to differences on measures of social desirability, Hispanics may be more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to choose extreme response categories (Hui & Triandis, 1989) and agree with items regardless of item content (Ross & Mirowsky, 1984). These effects have rarely been investigated in actual organizational settings; more typically, they have been studied in clinical and personality research (cf. Marin & Marin, 1991). With recent projections indicating a dramatic increase of Hispanics in the workplace (cf. Knouse, Rosenfeld, & Culbertson, 1992), organizational researchers should be aware of the potential impact of Hispanic cultural values on survey data.

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